BRITISH COUNCIL

11th International Language and Development Conference
18-20 November 2015, New Delhi, India

Multilingualism and Development

Hotel The Lalit, New Delhi, India

INITIAL CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT AND CALL FOR PAPERS

Key dates

Closing date for submission of proposals: **Friday 26 June 2015**

Notifications of acceptance: **Friday 10 July 2015**

Last date for speakers to confirm participation: **Friday 14 August 2015**

Conference: **Wednesday 18 to Friday 20 November 2015**

The Language and Development Conference series

The International Language and Development Conferences have been held every two years since 1993. They bring together professionals and researchers who are interested in the roles that languages play in development and in developing countries. The conferences address issues concerning world, national, second and minority languages in relation to human, cultural and economic development, language policy and education. Details of the conference trustees, publications, sponsors and organisers of previous conferences can be seen on the Language and Development Conference website at www.langdevconferences.org.

The British Council in India has been invited to host the 11th International Language and Development Conference. The event will take place in New Delhi from 18 to 20 November 2015.

In 2015 the theme of the Language and Development Conference is **Multilingualism and Development**. The conference aims to explore current understanding of a range of issues (see below), with evidence from a broad range of countries, in order to inform future research and practice on global, national and local levels.

The context

In 1984 D.P.Pattanayak, the first Director of the Central Institute of Indian Languages, made this deliberately provocative statement about the ubiquity of multilingualism in developing countries:

> *In the developed world … two languages are considered a nuisance, three languages uneconomic and many languages absurd. In multilingual countries, many languages are facts of life; any restriction in the choice of language is a nuisance; and one language is not only uneconomic, it is absurd.*

Pattanayak's generalisation about the 'developed world' no longer holds true, but it is certainly the case that linguistic diversity is a fact of life in developing countries. India is a good example, with two official languages, 22 languages 'scheduled' in the Indian Constitution, and a further 780 languages estimated to be in everyday use. India is therefore a highly appropriate context in which to hold an international conference on multilingualism and development.

Since 2010 more than half of the world's population has been living in urban areas and, by 2050, 66 per cent of people will be living in cities. Developing countries throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America face multiple challenges, including providing access to quality healthcare, education and opportunities for sustainable livelihoods for their people. The increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of urban centres raises critical issues, such as the language requirements necessary to provide minimum safety and security to migrants, access to civic amenities and public services, and support for the transition to urban lifestyles and consequent requisite life skills. Megacities and cities throughout the developing world experience similar challenges of linguistic super-diversity. Again, India provides an illustration: rapid urbanisation means that by 2031 it is predicted that India will have 70 of the world's 100 most populous urban centres.

The rapid growth of technology has been a significant factor in many developing countries, particularly through widespread access to mobile telephones and the Internet. This presents huge potential to leapfrog more traditional forms of information access and dissemination. However there are clear implications for the diversity of the linguistic landscape. Much information shared on the Internet and through other digital channels is available only in majority languages, in particular English. Questions remain about how this imbalance can be redressed or whether there will continue to be a digital divide, with speakers of minority languages at a significant disadvantage. A recent example has been the urgent need to provide information about Ebola in multiple West African languages and their respective writing systems – and to make that information available on mobile phones and through other media.

In addition, there is growing recognition of the impact of multilingualism on marginalised groups, including women, indigenous peoples (referred to as 'tribal groups' in India) and speakers of minority languages, all of whom are at risk of being denied full access to health, education, other government services, legal redress and participation in democratic processes if these are possible only through mainstream languages. A related issue is the rapidly growing phenomenon in many developing countries – including many in South Asian – of demand for private 'English-medium' schooling, fuelled by parental dissatisfaction with education provided through the national language by free state schools. Some parents from the poorest and most marginalised groups are willing to pay for this so-called 'English-medium' schooling, even though it may be of dubious quality.

Sub-themes

The conference will focus on the issues highlighted above. Attention will not be restricted to any particular sector and so the conference will look at the role that language plays in multilingual contexts in interactions with local government service providers, involvement with the legal system, undertaking cross border trade, taking part in other informal sector economic activities, accessing health care and education, obtaining access to the law, participating in democratic processes at local and national levels, consuming and contributing to the media at local and national levels, and so on.

The conference will also present an opportunity to examine the extent to which developments in research, policy and practice in the linguistically super-diverse cities of developed countries have relevance for highly diverse multilingual contexts in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In the specific context of education, mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB MLE) is now well established as an appropriate policy: the mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction in the first years of schooling and then children are helped to gradually transition to a national or global language in later years. Examples, including Guatemala and the Philippines, show that this approach reduces drop out and repetition rates, strengthens home-school communication and increases learner and teacher motivation. The benefits of MTB MLE have been thoroughly explored in several recent international conferences, including the 2nd and 3rd Conferences on Language, Education and Development (Bangkok 2010 and 2013) and the 9th and 10th Language and Development Conferences (Colombo 2011 and Cape Town 2013).

However, these multilingual education success stories tend to be found in relatively homogeneous rural contexts and particularly among minority language groups. It is hoped that the New Delhi Language and Development Conference will go beyond this in two ways, by examining multilingualism (including the feasibility of MTB MLE) in linguistically super-diverse *urban* contexts

and by exploring multilingualism in a wide gamut of contexts (not only in education). The conference therefore has three sub-themes.

1. Multilingualism and the metropolis

The issues that might be addressed include but are not limited to the following:

- Identifying and describing the linguistic implications of urbanisation
- The benefits of linguistic hyperdiversity
- Linguistic barriers experienced by migrant populations in urban contexts
- How schools, health clinics and other government services cater for speakers of dozens of different languages in super-diverse urban contexts
- The practice of MTB MLE - and the capacity of schools to provide it - in multilingual urban contexts
- Social division as an unintended consequence of MTB MLE in multilingual contexts
- Multilingualism in semi-urban and urban non-metropolitan contexts

2. Language, technology and multi-literacies

This sub-theme may explore issues such as (but not restricted) to the following:

- Digital media as threat or opportunity for minority languages
- Digital media and non-Latin-based writing systems
- The use of digital media at times of crisis and natural disasters, especially in multilingual societies
- Digital media and language choice in education
- Digital literacy, language and gender

3. Multilingualism, marginalisation and empowerment

Under this heading issues such as (but not limited to) these may arise:

- The tension between ideas of 'development' and formal education systems
- Educating girls and empowering women in multilingual societies
- Endangered languages and endangered livelihoods
- Language, identity and violence
- The role of parents in multilingual contexts
- Multilingualism in rural contexts, particularly in the context of accessing markets
- Prospects for indigenous peoples and speakers of minority languages in multilingual nations
- The roles of English in multilingual developing countries: empowering or marginalising?
- Describing and responding to the phenomenon of low cost private English-medium schools catering to the economically marginalised

The conference will generate a provisional agenda for further investigation of issues relating to multilingualism and development and for action by policy makers. The final version of this document will appear in the conference publication (see below) and in other media.

Conference format

The conference will consist of keynote presentations by eminent guest speakers, parallel sessions, debates and panel discussions. Individuals and teams are invited to submit proposals. Sessions will last for 60 minutes, which will include substantial time for discussion. Each session will be facilitated by a chairperson.

Presentations may be made in any language. Where a language other than English is used, the organisers will make every effort to find an interpreter.

Participants

It is expected that about 250 speakers and delegates will participate in the conference. The event will be of interest to professionals working in development in multilingual contexts, including project and programme implementers, key influencers and policy makers, senior ministry officials, consultants, researchers and other change agents involved in the fields of language, education, skills and employment, health, law, democratic processes and the media. Participants will come from India, other parts of South Asia and around the world.

Proposals

Proposals for papers and other types of presentation should be submitted in English on the proposal form and sent to LDC2015@in.britishcouncil.org no later than Friday 26 June 2015. Proposals will be reviewed by the conference committee and selected on the following criteria:

- Relevance to the conference theme and sub themes
- Originality
- Clarity, coherence and organisation
- Potential for audience interaction/involvement.

Conference publication

An edited selection of the most important plenary and parallel presentations will be published by the British Council in India in 2016. This volume will incorporate the final version of the agenda for research and action which emerges from the conference. It will join the prestigious series of publications from the ten previous conferences which are available for download from the websites of the Language and Development Conferences (www.langdevconferences.org) and the British Council (www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications).

Venue

The conference will be held in Hotel The Lalit, New Delhi, located just a short stroll away from Connaught Place and with easy access to the Metro system. Go to www.langdevconferences.org for the latest information.

Registration and conference fee

Speaker and Delegate categories	Early bird fee	Regular fee	Currency payable
India and SAARC countries	INR 8000	INR 10000	INR or GBP equivalent
International speakers and delegates	GBP 150	GBP 200	GBP or USD equivalent

- Registrations open: Monday 1 June 2015
- Early bird deadline: Monday 31 August 2015
- Registrations close: Monday 2 November

The conference fee includes the following:

- Conference bag with folder, programme brochure, materials, pen, unique conference ID
- Access to all sessions during the conference (some venues for the parallel sessions have limited capacity and these will be available on a first-come-first-seated basis)
- Buffet lunch, two services of tea/coffee on all three days of the conference

Please await a further announcement regarding registration and payment method.

You can write to LDC2015@in.britishcouncil.org or go to www.langdevconferences.org to register your interest in taking part in the conference. We will send you regular updates on the 11th Language and Development Conference from May 2015.